UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/ICEF/1993/10
8 February 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1993 session

FOR INFORMATION

PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION

The present document reports on and analyses major new trends and developments of UNICEF programme cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa region during 1992.

The UNICEF regional office has responsibility for UNICEF cooperation in the following countries and territories: Algeria, Bahrain, Cyprus, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Yemen, as well as the West Bank and Gaza.

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN	1 - 2	2
II.	HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAMME, REGIONAL COOPERATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES	3 - 22	2
	A. Placing children high on the agenda	3 - 6	2
	B. Children in especially difficult circumstances	7 - 9	3
	C. Sustaining progress in child survival	10 - 15	4
	D. Learning for the twenty-first century: regional flagship for the decade	16 - 22	5

I. POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHILDREN

1. In 1992, many positive developments occurred in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The Islamic Republic of Iran held national elections that opened new doors. Turkey witnessed a major shift after its national elections ushered in a full return to parliamentary democracy and an opposition party strongly committed to human rights. The process of democratization also continued in Jordan. However, many countries continued to feel the negative economic impact of the Gulf crisis, especially those that had to integrate large numbers of returning migrant workers and adjust to the loss of remittances and grants. Unsettled situations in Algeria, Djibouti, Iraq, Lebanon, the Sudan and the West Bank and Gaza put children in especially difficult circumstances under increasing stress. Uncertainty was a pervasive part of the environment during the year.

2. The report on programme developments in the region during 1991 sounded a more optimistic note, expecting a return to normalcy after a year when significant amounts of UNICEF emergency funds flowed into the region through Iraq, Jordan, the Sudan and Turkey (over $50 million, or 60 per cent of all UNICEF emergency support for the year). However, emergency operations continue: this year's emergency appeal for Iraq alone may reach $86 million and the Sudan also requires continuing emergency cooperation. The earthquake in Cairo, Egypt, in October 1992, provided a sober reminder that natural disasters, not just armed conflicts, can cause enormous human suffering in the region.

II. HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAMME, REGIONAL COOPERATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A. Placing children high on the agenda

3. Despite a climate of uncertainty and emergency, the region witnessed important steps forward for children. In November 1992, the League of Arab States held a high-level ministerial meeting in Tunis, Tunisia, on the situation of children. It approved a Pan Arab Plan for Children and agreed unanimously to a series of resolutions for immediate action through national programmes of action (NPAs). The resolutions call for the achievement of short-term goals in child survival and education.

4. The League of Arab States gave female education, particularly for girls, high priority. Its region-wide plan emphasized not only birth spacing, but also family planning, bringing to the forefront of regional and national agendas gender inequities. Against the background of chronic emergencies, the League's resolutions gave priority to all children in difficult circumstances. UNICEF assisted the League in developing a stronger regional perspective on children by supporting the preparation of a regional situation analysis of children; a special review of children in the Maghreb and in the Gulf region; a regional statistical profile on children; and an analysis of the 1990 universal child immunization (UCI) experience. UNICEF also assisted the League in determining the cost of reaching the goals of the Pan Arab Plan for Children.

5. The League meeting on children underlined the importance of implementing national programmes of action at the governor, provincial and municipal levels. The special role of governors and mayors was stressed, along with the need to find ways to reach underserved populations, involve communities and build subnational capacity for programme financing, delivery and monitoring. The regional office convened a separate meeting of UNICEF staff and experts with subnational planning and management experience to develop a strategy for strengthening national programme implementation in governorates and municipalities and to review how UNICEF can support this effort.

6. Special attention was given to developing a capacity to monitor national programme implementation, the driving force behind the regional office's development of a computer software package called DEEDS (data entry enhancement and display system). DEEDS tracks progress in reaching the goals for children at national and subnational levels. It also produces progress reports for policy makers and managers.

B. Children in especially difficult circumstances

7. The Middle East and North Africa region is prone to chronic violence and conflict. Children in Djibouti, Iraq, Lebanon, the Sudan and the West Bank and Gaza remained in difficult circumstances during the past year; in all cases these circumstances were man-made. Country programmes in Iraq and the Sudan, in particular, combined emergency operations with normal development activities. Both countries received significant UNICEF support, with a special focus on seeing that emergency operations in the north of Iraq functioned smoothly before the onset of winter.

8. During the year, UNICEF supported work in the region aimed at addressing the psychosocial effects of armed conflict on children. Specialists have counselled traumatized children in Iraq and Kuwait. Community worker training and televised parent guidance programmes have taken place in Kuwait, while the development of training curricula has begun in Iraq. A series of regional consultations has led to the development of a two-year programme that will produce guidebooks for teachers, health and other community outreach workers; create training modules for psychologists and child welfare workers; and produce regionally appropriate case materials on conflict-induced trauma in children. Priority has been given to projects under way in Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza.

9. A review of the situation of children in the Sudan underscored the importance of maintaining basic education services, even during the most disruptive periods. From the perspective of children themselves, continuing education is sometimes more important than basic health care. The regional office explored longer-term actions that could respond to the problems of violence in children's lives. UNICEF supported discussions at the regional level on how global education and education for development could be directed to this issue. Work is under way to develop and adapt education materials in selected countries to focus on building skills in interdependence, cooperative problem-solving and tolerance. They will be introduced and tested in one or two countries already engaged in education reform. The materials will also be tested with such regional youth organizations as the Arab Scout Federation. To

complement these activities, UNICEF is supporting a review of media violence in the region in order to reduce such violence and expand the use of positive programming for children.

C. Sustaining progress in child survival

10. As part of the overall effort to maintain the momentum in primary health care (PHC) gained through UCI activities, UNICEF supported a study, Learning from a Public Health Breakthrough: Lessons Learned from the UCI Experience in the Middle East and North Africa. The study brings together reports of many partners under one cover and summarizes lessons that will be useful in formulating strategies in the 1990s to accelerate primary health care.

11. During 1992, regional support focused on the eradication of poliomyelitis, the expansion of measles coverage, immunization of women with tetanus toxoid and the promotion of safe motherhood. These areas require extra efforts in regional technical assistance. Outbreaks of poliomyelitis, even in countries with exceptionally strong programmes such as Jordan, turned attention to the unreached and strengthened national capacity in surveillance and sustained outreach. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF regional offices designed strategies for the reduction of poliomyelitis, measles and tetanus, especially in areas with poor coverage, the core of their common agenda at the WHO/UNICEF joint intercountry meeting.

12. UNICEF is developing a neonatal tetanus intervention strategy for high-risk areas, with special emphasis on overcoming the barriers that keep women from seeking reproductive health care. In collaboration with the Population Council, the regional office published Silent Endurance, a book that examined the factors that have slowed progress in women's health. This is part of a larger UNICEF effort throughout the region, in conjunction with other partners, to improve the status of women and bring women's health and family planning squarely into the forefront of maternal and child health concerns.

13. In 1991, it appeared that diarrhoeal diseases were retreating as the number one killer in the region. However, as more hard evidence appears, this no longer seems to be the case. Concern about slippage in diarrhoeal disease programmes mounted in the region during 1992. Studies showed a drop in the use of oral rehydration therapy in some countries and failure to expand its use, as planned, in others. Sustained behavioural change requires better training and communication strategies. Corrective action is under way in Morocco and Tunisia, and an international evaluation is in progress in Egypt. Lessons learned will contribute to a region-wide programme in 1993.

14. Close regional collaboration with WHO has moved beyond the expanded programme on immunization and the control of diarrhoeal diseases to a broader array of programmes for the 1990s. In 1992, the region held its first acute respiratory infections programme managers' meeting. Also in 1992, cooperation was initiated with the World Federation of Medical Education to explore how preventive and community medicine in medical school curricula in the region can be strengthened.

15. UNICEF fostered a region-wide nutrition network in cooperation with WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations focusing on micronutrient deficiencies. The regional office organized a micronutrient review and mapping system for the region in preparation for a regional meeting in 1993 with WHO and the International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders. A regional strategy for micronutrient deficiencies is also being prepared.

D. Learning for the twenty-first century: regional flagship for the decade

16. Sustaining achievements of the 1980s in primary health care and in support for children in especially difficult circumstances continues to be a high priority for the entire region. Yet despite major strides during recent years, the region suffers from significant problems of gender disparity in school enrolment, high drop-out rates, illiteracy, lack of quality in learning and insufficient preparation of young people in the knowledge and skills required for life in the next century.

17. UNICEF collaboration in basic education in the region is based on a strategy of meeting the essential learning needs of families by imparting basic knowledge and skills. A review of the situation of girls' education in the Middle East and North Africa region initiated in 1992 is nearing completion. The review highlights strategies to increase girls' access to education, to increase the relevance of such education and to foster the development of a social and political climate that values and actively promotes the education of girls.

18. In the area of early childhood development, a series of regional consultations and exchanges during the year have produced a three-year programme focused on parents, utilizing communication modules on significant stages of childhood development that can be modified for use on television or in community-based parent education activities. These modules are to be accompanied by guidebooks for parents to use in the home. Five countries, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Turkey, are involved in the regional initiative, while Egypt, well-advanced in early childhood development programming, will also be involved in a consultative capacity.

19. In expanding basic knowledge and skills for living beyond the health-centred Facts for Life, a regional, six-country assessment has been completed to identify the concerns and needs of women with regard to the environment. The findings of the survey will form the basis for a regional environmental Facts for Life publication in 1993.

20. Recognizing the past success and future potential of the mass media, particularly television, as a learning medium, UNICEF supported the development of a "communication for learning" strategy. It aims to strengthen the overall capacity of television to promote and support improved child survival, protection and development in the region. The strategy pulls together, for training purposes, the best examples of television programming on PHC from countries in the region; involves training activities geared to incorporating Facts for Life messages into different television formats; diffuses global

education concepts related, for example, to interdependence, social justice, images and stereotypes, respect for civilizations different from one's own and respect for the environment; and uses television to support new approaches in community-based early childhood development and to reinforce the training of schoolteachers and family members in dealing with children affected by the violence of armed conflict. The aim is to make television a major element in the learning process.

21. During the past year, a survey of national television was carried out in selected countries as a foundation for future capacity-building. To support training and improve the content of children's programmes, consultants collected the best of children's television programmes from the region and from international sources, particularly internationally recognized children's film festivals. In addition, the Arab States Broadcasting Union conducted a two-week training course for directors and scriptwriters from several countries in how to improve programmes for and about children. UNICEF provided technical support on message design and on how to incorporate knowledge on child care and protection and Facts for Life messages.

22. The regional office supported the filming of projects that promote Facts for Life. These six- to eight-minute films will be televised to raise awareness of health education and to put Facts for Life messages into the hands of families. UNICEF is cooperating with the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ALESCO) in collecting the best children's stories from around the region, stories that promote such values as cooperation, sharing, tolerance and altruism. They will be used as the basis for television programming for children.